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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000874

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PBTS](#) [ER](#) [ET](#) [SO](#) [AU](#)
SUBJECT: TRYING TO CORRECT ETHIOPIA'S COURSE AWAY FROM
CONFRONTING ERITREA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 853

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeda Alemu told Ambassador March 20 that increased tensions with Eritrea poses serious security challenges for Ethiopia and for stability in Somalia. Takeda has argued for a strong statement condemning Eritrea as a terrorist state, at the AU and UNSC, over the recent hostage-taking. We have cautioned that such public statements will undercut Ethiopia's position and could do more harm than good to the remaining eight Ethiopian hostages, potentially intensifying the border conflict and Eritrea-Ethiopia animosities. Ethiopia is focused on Eritrea because of its support of extremists in Somalia, who are in direct conflict with Ethiopian troops there; Eritrean expansion in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and disputed areas, though mostly in Eritrean territory, which is being construed as a provocative action; and alleged cross-border activities by Eritrean troops.

12. (S/NF) Post believes Ethiopia is not seeking a conflict with Eritrea, given Ethiopia's heavy commitment in Somalia. Rather, Ethiopia feels that strong international criticism of Eritrea would help to put Isaias back in his "box" and limit his unhelpful activities, especially in Somalia. Post is trying to persuade Ethiopia to:

- Avoid taking a critical approach to Eritrea because it will only heighten tensions with Eritrea and be misunderstood by the international community;
- Dissuade Ethiopia from raising Eritrean terrorism at the UN, because there is probably little support;
- Separate the hostage issue, a humanitarian problem, from the border issue and from criticism of Eritrea;
- Focus on the good efforts Ethiopia is doing in Somalia: providing force protection for Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and support for reconciliation conference; and
- Let other countries criticize Eritrea's unhelpful activities in Darfur and in Somalia supporting extremist elements.

13. (S/NF) Takeda noted that the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) decision not to physically demarcate the border, as originally decided by the EEBC, runs counter to the EEBC guidelines and will only increase border tensions.

Ethiopia is looking to the international community on next steps on the border issue. END SUMMARY.

HELPING ETHIOPIA FROM MAKING MISTAKES

¶4. (S/NF) Ambassador met privately with Minister Takeda on March 20 to discuss Takeda's March 19 meetings with some of the diplomatic corps on condemnation of Eritrea for the recent hostage-taking of five British Embassy staff and thirteen Ethiopians. Eight Ethiopians remain as hostages. Takeda noted Eritrea's unhelpful activities supporting extremist elements in Somalia, undercutting the Abuja Peace Accords for Darfur, and Eritrean expansion into the buffer area (TSZ) between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Though the TSZ was mostly in Eritrean territory, such expansion was a violation of the Algiers Accord and was a provocative step by Eritrea, Takeda noted. He added that Ethiopia was collecting evidence that Eritrea was behind the recent kidnappings.

¶5. (S/NF) Takeda noted that public statements by the international community and statements at the AU and UNSC condemning Eritrea's acts would be helpful in putting Eritrea on notice that its activities are unacceptable and will contribute to regional instability. Takeda noted that some African Union members were perplexed that there had been silence about the Ethiopians still being held hostage once the European hostages were released. (NOTE: We have received comments from our African Ambassadorial colleagues here criticizing the silence from the Europeans and U.S. on the eight remaining African (Ethiopian) still unaccounted for in the recent kidnappings. END NOTE.)

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EMBASSY APPROACH: LET OTHERS CARRY THE WATER

¶6. (S/NF) The Ambassador replied to Takeda that public statements specifically targeting Eritrea or raising the issue at the UN would not be helpful and would not gain international support. This is not to say that Eritrea's unhelpful activities are being overlooked. Rather, provocative statements would only increase tensions. Both Ambassador and Minister Takeda agreed that a neutral statement could be useful.

¶7. (S/NF) The Embassy plans to continue discussions with our Ethiopian contacts to stress the following points:
-- Ethiopia should avoid charging Eritrea as a terrorist state or criticize Eritrean actions, because it will be seen only in the context of a bitter bilateral problem rather than Eritrea engaged in destabilizing activities;
-- Dissuade Ethiopia from raising Eritrean terrorism at the UN, because there is probably little support;
-- Separate the hostage issue from the border issue and criticism of Eritrea, because the hostage issue is a humanitarian problem;
-- Refocus Ethiopia on highlighting the good efforts it is doing in Somalia, by providing force protection for the TFG and AMISOM, and support for the success of a reconciliation conference, as well as emphasizing privately its commitment to eliminate HVT and provide the U.S. and others with information obtained in Somalia; and
-- Let other countries criticize Eritrea's unhelpful activities in Darfur and in Somalia supporting extremist elements.

EEBC

¶8. (S/NF) Takeda criticized the EEBC decision to make the delimited line the final demarcated line by November 2007,

thus completing the work of the EEBC. Takeda noted that such a decision was counter to the guidelines provided by the EEBC calling for a physical demarcation to complete the border process. Takeda said Ethiopia was examining the implications of the EEBC to conclude its work in November 2007. He reiterated his constant theme that the February 22, 2006, meeting in New York of Witnesses to the Algiers Accord, which called for a dialogue to resolve the consequences of the demarcation (such as the division of some 30 towns and villages in one area of the border, potentially creating 60,000 refugees) was essential to a peaceful demarcation process. Tekeda noted that the Witnesses had called for Eritrea and Ethiopia to respect UNSCR 1640 (which Ethiopia asserts it has done), including acceptance of the EEBC, and had specifically noted that Eritrea must lift restrictions on UN operations. The UNSC had issued a presidential statement supporting the Witnesses' statement. This should be the basis upon which the EEBC should finalize the demarcation process, according to Takeda.

¶9. (S/NF) COMMENT: Foreign Minister Seyoum returns from his trip to Somalia and the EU next week. At that time, the Ethiopians will finalize what actions it will take against Eritrea. It is clear that Ethiopia is trying to avoid a war with Eritrea, because of its commitment of troops to Somalia and aversion to fight on another front. But due to domestic pressure over the continued captivity of Ethiopian hostages and frustration with Eritrean support for extremists in Somalia fighting the TFG and Ethiopian troops, Ethiopia believes AU and UNSC statements will be the best tactic to keep Eritrea boxed in. We will keep Washington informed of our approach to the Ethiopian government. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) Embassy Asmara was given prior copy of this cable.
YAMAMOTO